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BRIEF MENTION

Poetry and Dreams. By F. C. Prescott (Boston, The Four Seas Company, 1919). In the history of literature the use of the dream as a structural device is to be noticed in all periods; in medieval times it commands very special attention and has elicited several monographs. W. Baake's *Die Verwendung des Traummotivs in der englischen Dichtung bis Chaucer* (Diss. Halle a. S., 1906), may be mentioned, not for exceptional merits, but because it supplies a study of the subject in English literature of a period that keeps the dream in the category of stylistic devices against the background of popular belief. He asks the psychological question "denn was ist der Traum anders als ein unbewusstes Erdichten, oder das Dichten anders als ein waches Träumen?" merely to imply that this doctrine was not in vogue in the objective, realistic period studied by him, and that it has often misled writers to accept the rubric "Das Leben ein Traum" (p. 54). He finds that medieval literature, not admitting individual subjectivity in the modern sense, restricts the subconscious activity of the dreamer's mind chiefly to a pictorial or dramatic reflection of the objects, events, and ideas of the time. Chaucer and the author of *Piers the Plowman* are 'makers'; not dreamers but the makers of dreams. Not to digress into a discussion of what Goldsmith named "the disagreeable institution of effect and cause," the connotations of poetry, inspiration, and dreams have become intimately interlocked and blended in a psychological interpretation of the activities of the creative imagination. Hebbel (quoted by Mr. Prescott, p. 5) exclaims, "My belief that dream and poetry are identical, is more and more confirmed." Other witnesses are called. Charles Lamb says, "the true poet dreams being awake," and Sully Prudhomme defines poetry to be "le rêve par lequel l'homme aspire à une vie supérieure." The witnesses are many and in essential agreement. The 'divine madness' has now come to be regarded as a subject for investigation in the psychological laboratory, where it responds to tests of the different aspects of consciousness and discloses the nature of sleep and the characteristics of genius. This was sure to follow such utterances as have been cited, to which may be added that of Jean Paul Richter: "Genius is, in more senses than one, a sleep-walker, and in its bright dream can accomplish what one awake could never do." The power of creative detachment is to be understood as superior ability in the act of dreaming, superior control of what is stored up in the subconscious treasury.

No more recent investigator and writer has handled the subject of the interaction of subliminal mentation and conscious thought in a more fascinatingly suggestive manner than that maintained by Frederic W. H. Myers in the initial chapters of *Human Personality* (1903). In his view it is by 'subliminal uprushes' that con-

scious efforts are spiritually and artistically enriched and heightened; that these uprushes "often contain knowledge which no ordinary method of research could acquire"; and that the "inspiration of Genius" is therefore "a subliminal uprush, and emergence into the current of ideas which man is consciously manipulating of other ideas which he has not consciously originated, but which have shaped themselves beyond his will, in the profounder regions of his being." The confirming confession of Wordsworth is cited:

An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendor.

Bodily eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in the mind.

Again, to follow Myers in the reiteration of his leading proposition: "When the subliminal mentation co-operates with and supplements the supraliminal, without changing the apparent phase of personality, we have *genius*." The degree of his superior ability to avail himself of the subliminal storehouse measures the genius of a man, and constitutes the characteristic difference between genius and average ability. Now, it is in Art that the results of this drawing upon the deeper knowledge and wider symbolism stored up subliminally will be likely to become manifest above the conscious threshold.

Myers insists on spiritistic implications of his theory. He does not let the matter rest in the statement that genius is "that happy mixture of subliminal with supraliminal faculty," but adds that, in his view, the subliminal "is in closer relation than the supraliminal to the spiritual world." By this he is drawn into observations on the difference, the temperamental difference, between men, which conditions the character and the limitations of their respective endowments in subliminal resources. Not to pronounce on the value of this branch of his speculation, it remains true that Myers has left a discussion of the two aspects of consciousness that is unsurpassed as an introduction to the psycho-analysis of the literary artist, to say nothing of the ever widening reach of this new manner of analyzing old experiences.

Mr. Prescott has made no reference to Myers, but he cannot be supposed to deny the pertinence and the advantage of keeping him in mind. Besides, there is, what may not be at once suspected, an excuse for Mr. Prescott's omission of an introduction to his subject that would necessarily contain some consideration of the chapters in Myers' book. The excuse emerges from the inherent difference between a book and a 'paper' or article in a periodical, for Mr. Prescott has merely detached and put forth in book-form an article he had published in *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, VII

(1912-13), 17-46; 104-143. The reader may think that he is rather unfairly left to discover this for himself. There is no preface or note giving the information, and the imprint, "Copy-right, 1912," is not in itself clear. Mr. Prescott's 'book,' tho dated 1919, is therefore not less than seven years old. That the 'article' in this form will become more widely known in the circle of literary students must be Mr. Prescott's reason for reprinting it as a book, and the same motive may be valid as a justification of this 'brief mention.'

It would be futile to deny that psycho-analysis can contribute nothing of importance to the deeper understanding of literature. The new science is too much concerned with the activities of the creative imagination to have no effect on literary criticism and the interpretation of the critic's terminology. The student of literary art is not required to become a Freudian, but he cannot afford to stand apart and refuse to avail himself of any advantage that may be gained from a set of new symbols. This describes the attitude of Mr. Prescott. He is not a psycho-analyst, but merely as a student of literature examines the "resemblance and unexplained relation between poetry and dreams" in the light of Freud's *Traumdeutung*, assuming "the soundness of Dr. Freud's theory, though this may be still in debate among psychologists."

As already noticed, Myers appealed to the poets themselves for confirmation of his interpretation of the activities of creative 'genius.' Mr. Prescott does the same, and justifies the method: "New theories of this kind, if at all important, are seldom new in the sense that they have not been surmised and foreshadowed by poets and other imaginative writers. This is a part of the function of poets as prophets—to see truth imaginatively before it is grasped intellectually. It is one of the tests of new doctrines to ask if they thus find confirmation in literature" (p. 7). The creative genius being operative in all departments of literature and the other arts, the appeal is wide in its reach. Both Myers and Prescott find the new metaphor confirmed in clearest terms by Robert Louis Stevenson's acknowledgment of the help of the Brownies (Myers, p. 91), and Myers quotes (*inter alia*) the words of De Musset: "On ne travaille pas, on écoute, c'est comme un inconnu que vous parlez à l'oreille"; and the summary statement of M. Ribot: "It is the unconscious which produces what is vulgarly called inspiration." Accepting, then, the metaphors of the discussion (see Myers, p. 14, note), the subconscious activity of the mind is, of course, common to all men (Prescott, p. 66); but the man of genius has the superior power to bring under supraliminal control the subliminal thought and desires of the average man, and thus add to what Carlyle describes as "the uttered part of man's life" (p. 23).

Too much is brought together by Myers and Mr. Prescott that relates to the old metaphors such as imagination and fancy, inspira-

tion and enthusiasm, instinct, poetic frenzy or ecstasy, insight, prophecy, abstraction, and the like, to favor an inclination on the part of the literary student to be indifferent to this subject. He is being drawn into it by books and periodicals that might be supposed to be outside of his special province, as, for example by Dr. Coriot's book, *The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth* (1912), from which a chapter has been translated and taken up in the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse und Psychotherapie* (iv, 384 ff.); and the first appearance of Mr. Prescott's contribution evokes connotations of the same character.

What is the source of the perceptions and desires expressed beneath the threshold of consciousness? How Myers deals with the question has already been indicated. Mr. Prescott moves somewhat in the same direction when he connects the irresponsible world of dreams with the acts and feelings of childhood: "In general the dream experiences, as compared with those of waking, have a kind of freshness and vigorous youthfulness about them as if they stood nearer to life's source" (p. 36; cf. also p. 63 note 2). But the creative endowment is made effectual thru education and discipline. Coleridge outlined the comprehensive knowledge to be acquired by one that would aspire to achieve an epic, and Keats longed for time and privilege to learn more so that he might write better. There is an empirical view of how things are done that will not be relegated to the area of the vague when products of the creative mind are considered. Locke is not yet altogether superseded. One cannot build without acquired building-material. At this angle another set of symbols may be introduced to figure the activities of the creative mind, and M. Nicolas Kostyleff comes forward with *Le Mécanisme cérébral de la pensée*, denying the Freudian theory of poetic inspiration. The poet, fitted by temperament and specific sensibility, must above all have an efficient "personal mechanism of verbal reactions. This mechanism is a part of inspiration." What is stored up in the mind in association with words sinks into the subconscious, whence it is drawn forth by interlocking chains of association. Myers' 'uprush' now becomes "a verbal discharge of automatic associations." In the composition of poetry, "no sooner does one flight of ideas come to an end than some overtone in it awakens further associations and another flight begins."—The mystery takes on various names, but remains a mystery.

This notice was in the hands of the printer before it was observed that Myers' *Human Personality* has been re-issued in an abridged form (Longmans, Green & Co.; see *The Athenæum* for Jan. 16). This fact does at least not contradict the judgment, expressed above, that Myers has supplied the best introduction to the theory of subconscious activities.

Since the publication in which it appears has not been generally accessible and the discussion itself is of considerable importance, it may be worth while to call the attention of students of early French literature to a pamphlet by Karl Christ called *Die altfranzösischen Handschriften der Palatina* (*Beihefte zum Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, XLVI, Leipzig, 1916). Dr. Christ, believing that the three Old French manuscripts in the University library of Heidelberg could hardly have been the only representatives of that language among the great collections of the counts of the Palatinate, came to the conclusion, especially after studying early inventories, that the missing volumes must be among the *Palatini latini* in the Vatican. Accordingly, he searched the cases containing these Palatine manuscripts, and was richly rewarded by the discovery of some twenty-five uncatalogued and, for practical purposes, unknown French manuscripts.

The contents of these as well as of the three manuscripts at Heidelberg he has carefully described in his pamphlet. Moreover, he not only gives generous excerpts from the various works in each manuscript, but in most cases adds valuable literary and historical notes as well, so that his discussions are a distinct contribution to the literature of the subjects considered. Space forbids giving a complete catalog of the material thus brought to light. It includes a fragment of the *chanson de geste*, *Aspremont*, manuscripts of *Folque de Candie*, *Partonopeus de Blois*, *Floire et Blanckeflor* (fragment), *Amadas et Idoine* (frag.), Wace's *Brut* (frag.), Gautier de Coincy's *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, a prose *Tristan* and *Mort d'Artus*, a translation of the *Belli sacri historia*, William de Wadington's *Manuel des péchés*, Jean Chapuis' *Sept articles de la foi* (frag.), a *Passion* play, a *Bible abrégée* (prose), Guillaume de Deguilleville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, Aldebrandin de Sienne's *Régime du Corps*, various short theological and didactic works in prose and verse, Christine de Pisan's *Cité des dames*, Alain Chartier's *Livre des quatre dames* and *Consolation des trois vertus*, Laurent de Premierfait's translation of the *Decameron*, Martin Le Franc's *Champion des dames*, Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troie*, and finally two important sixteenth century manuscripts: a collection of poems by Clément Marot, Melin de Saint-Gelais and their friends, and a Protestant play of the Reformation, the *Tragédie du Sac de Cabrière*.

G. F.